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The Russian SFSR includes the entire polar belt of the USSR, with the Arctic islands of Franz-Josef Land, Novaya Zemlya, Severnaya Zemlya (North Land), the New Siberian and Vrangel' (Wrangel) islands, and so forth. Along the shores of the Arctic seas lies the tundra zone, which was settled by the Russians more than 700 years ago in its western (European) section, but only in recent years in its eastern (Asiatic) section. The taiga, in the south, occupies the major portion of the territory of the republic. Consisting largely of evergreens, the forest belt also has deciduous-tree zones, particularly in the European part. Farther south lies the black-earth belt, at first covered with a wooded steppe vegetation, but gradually changing into the steppe proper. The extreme south is a dry steppe, in which chestnut soils predominate; these are, however, only slightly inferior to the black earth with respect to fertility. Subtropical vegetation occurs only on the southern shore of the Crimea and along the Black Sea littoral of the Caucasus.

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Because of its extensive coal and petroleum resources, the Russian SFSR is best supplied with power-producing minerals. Two of the largest coal basins of the world lie within the confines of the Asiatic portion of the republic: the Kuznetsk Basin, along the upper Tom' River, between the Salair Ridge and the Kuznetsk Ala-Tau, and the Tunguska Basin (as yet unexploited), along the lower Yenisey River, largely north of the Lower Tunguska, its right affluent. Lesser basins in Siberia are near Minusinsk and Cheremkhovo and along the Bureya River, while the Moscow and Vorkuta basins are most important in the European part. The Russian SFSR also includes the eastern section of the Donets Basin, the major portion of which lies within the Ukrainian SSR. An important petroleum zone extends throughout the European part of the Russian SFSR, beginning on the Arctic Circle in the Pechora River basin, along the western slopes of the Urals, past Molotov and Ufa, widening westward to the middle Volga in the area of Kuybyshev and Syzran', passing through the Gur'yev-Emba area of the Kazakh SSR, and reappearing north of the Greater Caucasus range at Makhachkala, Groznyy, and Maykop. In the very center of the European section of the Russian SFSR lies about one-half of the world's reserves of iron ore. Here more than 200 billion tons of low-grade ore lie buried in the Central Russian upland, east and southeast of Kursk, in the so-called Kursk magnetic anomaly. Other iron deposits occur in the Kola Peninsula, near Kerch' in the Crimea, in the Urals, and in Siberia.